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Follow-up to the CES 2013 seminar on challenges in providing access to micro-data for research

Follow-up to the Conference of European Statisticians' 2013 seminar on challenges in providing access to micro-data for research purposes

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

This note provides information on the progress in follow-up to the decisions of the Conference of European Statisticians 2013 seminar on challenges in providing access to micro-data for research purposes.

The Conference of European Statisticians Bureau discussed the follow-up activities and decided on the next steps at its meeting on 21-22 October 2013.

The note is presented to the Conference of European Statisticians for information.

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I. Introduction

1. The 2013 Plenary Session of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) included a seminar on the "challenges in providing access to micro-data for research purposes". The seminar was chaired by Slovenia, and the two sessions within the seminar by the United States and New Zealand. There were several active discussions, resulting in various proposals for follow-up activities. The conclusions and recommendations are recorded in the final report of the CES plenary session, and are presented below.

2. The Conference concluded that providing access to micro-data is a key challenge for all statistical organizations. Whilst some national considerations remain, particularly concerning the legal framework, there has been considerable progress over the last ten years in finding new ways to provide micro-data access to different user groups.

3. The Conference agreed on the follow-up actions as listed below:

(a) Share experience between statistical organizations in managing relationships with users of micro-data and improving the transparency of micro-data access processes;

(b) Develop a "check list" of the different steps for the systematic development of a micro-data access system;

(c) Update the section on good practices in the 2007 publication "Principles and Guidelines for Managing Statistical Confidentiality and Micro-data Access";

(d) Develop a common risk assessment framework for micro-data access;

(e) Harmonise terminology based on the glossary developed by the OECD Expert Group on micro-data access;

(f) Develop recommendations on quality management and measurement, as well as metadata standards related to micro-data access;

(g) Consider the High-Level Group on the Modernisation of Statistical Production and Services as a vehicle to promote the sharing of innovative solutions.

4. The Conference welcomed the rich debates during the seminar and asked the Secretariat and the CES Bureau to follow up on the issues raised. The CES Bureau was asked to discuss at its next meeting how to implement the proposed follow-up actions.

5. The next section presents the possible follow-up actions suggested by the Secretariat to the CES Bureau taking into account resource and priority constraints of the Secretariat.

II. Decisions regarding follow-up work

A. Share experience between statistical organizations in managing relationships with users of micro-data and improving the transparency of micro-data access processes

6. The Bureau decided to merge this proposal with proposal C - Update the section on good practices in the 2007 publication "Principles and Guidelines for Managing Statistical Confidentiality and Micro-data Access". This action is also to some extent covered by the work of the OECD Expert Group on Micro-data Access. Launching a separate activity would not add much value at the current time.

B. Develop a "check list" of the different steps for the systematic development of a micro-data access system

7. This activity would be of value to the international statistical community, particularly for organizations with less experience in providing access to micro-data. It could be seen as a follow-up activity to proposal C - Update the section on good practices in the 2007 publication "Principles and Guidelines for Managing Statistical Confidentiality and Micro-data Access". If enough up-to-date examples of good practices are made available, this will facilitate the development of such a check list.

8. It may be necessary to create a short-term task force of experts from national and international organizations to implement this proposal. However, due to other competing priorities, the Bureau decided to put this on hold, and consider undertaking work in this area in two years' time.

C. Update the section on good practices in the 2007 publication "Principles and Guidelines for Managing Statistical Confidentiality and Micro-data Access"

9. The June 2011 meeting of the CES Bureau reviewed the UNECE publication "Principles and Guidelines for Managing Statistical Confidentiality and Micro-data Access". It concluded that, whilst the principles and guidelines themselves were still relevant, the good practices outlined in the case studies, also contained in the publication, should be reviewed and updated where necessary. This action was therefore already underway at the time of the seminar, albeit at a rather slow pace due to resource limitations.

10. The publication is now printed, and changes to the United Nations publications policy mean that producing a revised version as a paper publication will not be possible. However, to facilitate the updating of the case studies on a more regular basis, the publication has been transferred to electronic format, and published in a wiki format[1]. All authors of the original case studies have been invited to provide updates, and new case studies have been sought. As a result, the electronic version of the publication is gradually evolving.

11. The Bureau asked the Secretariat to continue to seek updates and new case studies, for example at the Work Session on Statistical Confidentiality in October 2013.

D. Develop a common risk assessment framework for micro-data access

12. Whilst this activity might be of interest to the international statistical community, due to other competing priorities, the Bureau decided to put this on hold, and review the need for this work in two years' time.

E. Harmonise terminology based on the glossary developed by the OECD Expert Group on micro-data access

13. There is an evolving proposal to harmonise terminology relating to the initiatives of the High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Statistical Production and Services (HLG), as part of the work programme of the Modernisation Committee on Standards. This work

[1] http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/confid

would draw on a number of different sources, and could include terms related to micro-data access.

14. The Bureau asked the Modernisation Committee on Standards to take into account this proposal when developing its work programme.

F. Develop recommendations on quality management and measurement, as well as metadata standards related to micro-data access

15. This proposal could involve a significant amount of work, and require the creation of an expert group. Whilst this work would clearly be useful, the Bureau decided to review this activity in two years' time.

G. The High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Statistical Production and Services as a vehicle to promote the sharing of innovative solutions

16. HLG already has this function in general terms, but has not yet applied it in the specific area of micro-data access. The proposed wiki-based documentation of good practices (see proposal C above), and the regular reviewing of priorities at the annual HLG workshops would seem to go at least part way to meeting this requirement. The Bureau, therefore, encouraged HLG to continue to consider mechanisms for promoting the sharing of innovative solutions in a range of areas, including micro-data access.

III. Additional issues raised by the Bureau

17. In addition to the above decisions by the Bureau in October 2013, the following issues were raised in the discussion:

(a) Follow-up actions should be incorporated within existing activities where possible;

(b) The OECD Expert Group on Micro-data Access is preparing a handbook that will address some of the proposed follow-up activities. Its mandate has been extended for one year. It is proposed to wait until the results of this work are available before deciding whether to launch new activities under CES;

(c) The glossary being developed by the OECD Expert Group will be finalised by early 2014;

(d) It is important to have a platform to share experiences. UNECE has transferred the publication *Managing Statistical Confidentiality and Micro-data Access* to a wiki format, and is seeking new and updated case studies of national experiences;

(e) Eurostat will provide a case study in early 2014, based on the application of Commission Regulation (EU) 557/2013 on access to confidential data for scientific purposes;

(f) It was proposed to combine the follow-up activities A (sharing experience) and C (updating good practices in the 2007 publication on managing confidentiality), as well as B (preparing a check list for the development of a micro-data access system) and F (harmonising terminology).

18. The Bureau asked the Secretariat to follow up with the work taking into account the above suggestions by the Bureau.